

Mokilese language

Mokilese also known as **Mwoakilloan**, **Mwokilese**, or **Mwoakilese** is a Micronesian language originally spoken on Mwoakilloa, Federated States of Micronesia. Of the 1200 Mokilese speakers, only about 500 live on Mwoakilloa.^[3]

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Mokilese	
Mwoakilloa	
Native to	Micronesia
Region	Mwoakilloa
Native speakers	(1,500 cited 1979–2010) ^[1]
Language family	Austronesian - Malayo-Polynesian - Oceanic - Micronesian - Nuclear Micronesian - Chuukic–Pohnpeic - Pohnpeic Mokilese
Writing system	Latin script
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	mkj
Glottolog	moki1238 (http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/moki1238) ^[2]

Introduction

History

Mokilese originated from the Mokil (or Mwoakilloa) Atoll, but speakers have also migrated approximately 100 miles west, to the Pohnpei Islands, and parts of the United States. Mwoakilloa and Pohnpei are both geographically part of the Caroline Islands just above Papua New Guinea. Mwoakilloa is a district of the outlying islands of Pohnpei of the Federated States of Micronesia.

Before Western contact, Mokilese only had contact with its neighboring islands: Pohnpei, Pingelap, Kosrae, and the Marshall Islands. After Spanish explorers "rediscovered" Mokil Atoll, they colonized it in 1886 (Hezel, 1992). Shortly after they lost the Spanish-American War in 1898, they sold it to Germany (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2014). Later, in 1914, it was seized by Japan and heavily fortified during World War II, until Japan surrendered and passed it on to the United States in August 1945 (Hezel, 1992). Thereafter, it became a part of the UN trust territory under U.S. jurisdiction in 1947 until the trust territory dissolved in 1986 (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2014).

Population

Mokilese is both the name of the Mokil population and the language which they speak. It is currently spoken on Mokil Atoll, the Pohnpei Islands, and in some parts of the United States. There are only approximately 1,500 speakers of this language left. 1,050 of whom reside in Micronesia; a little over 900 in Pohnpei and less than 150 in Mokil Atoll. The other 450 speakers are scattered across the United States (Lewis, Simons, & Fennig, 2013). Although this language originated in Mokil Atoll, there are now only around 150 speakers who live in Mokil Atoll, while the rest live in diaspora communities—approximately 100 miles west—to Pohnpei, where they remain until this day (Rehg & Bender, 1990).

Classification

Mokilese is a Micronesian language, and therefore, a part of the Austronesian language family. Mokilese belongs to the Ponapeic subgrouping, and is the sister language of Pingelapese and Pohnpeian. Mokilese shares approximately 79% lexical similarity with Pingelapese, and 75% with Pohnapeian (Lewis, Simons, & Fennig, 2013).

Sounds

Consonants

The Mokilese language consists of the following consonant phonemes: /p, b, f, v, m, t, d, θ, ð, s, z, n, l, r, c, j, ɲ, y, k, g, ŋ, pʷ, mʷ, and w/ (Harrison & Albert, 1976). Note, that these are not the number of consonants that they use in writing, but rather the number of different consonant sounds they produce. There are also quite a few consonant allophones in the Mokilese language: /p, pʷ, m, mʷ, t, θ, ð, n, ɲ, ŋ/.

Vowels

The vowel phonemes present in Mokilese are: /i, e, ɛ, ɪ, ʉ, ə, ʌ, a, u, o, and ɔ/ (Harrison & Albert, 1976). Mokilese use both long and short vowels for all existing vowels. Mokilese also allows triphthongs in their language, which is rare among the Pacific languages.

- *java* – sweet taro
- *doau* – climb

Syllable structure

Mokilese uses words which begin and end with a consonant, begin and end with a vowel, begin with a vowel and end with a consonant, and even ones that begin with a consonant and end with a vowel. However, this does not mean that there are no rule at all. Mokilese syllables still maintain a set of rules as explained by Harrison and Albert (1976):

1. In Mokilese, a sequence of consonants within a word does not normally belong to the same syllable, because it is difficult to produce a sequence like CCV. If two consonants come together within a word, place a syllable boundary between them. (Remember that ng is a single consonant even though it is written with two letters.)

angkoa 'anchor' *ang-koa*
dipkelkel 'to stumble' *dip-kel-kel*
janjal 'clear' *jan-jal*

1. If a single consonant occurs between two vowels within a word, place a syllable boundary before the consonant.

dangahnga 'lazy' *da-ngah-nga*
widek 'to pour' *wi-dek*
pere 'room' *pe-re*

1. If two vowels come together within a word, place a syllable boundary between them.

duhrion 'kind of tree' *duh-ri-on*
injinjued 'sad' *in-jin-ju-ed*
kia 'to not want' *ki-a*

Historical sound changes

Mokilese reflexes of Proto Oceanic consonants ^[4]																				
Proto Oceanic	*mp	*mp,ŋp	*p	*m	*m,ŋm	*k	*ŋk	*ŋ	*y	*w	*t		*s,ŋj	*ns,j	*j	*nt,nd	*d,R	*l	*n	*ɲ
Proto Micronesian	*p	*p ^w	*f	*m	*m ^w	*k	*x	*ŋ	*y	*w	*t	*T	*s	*S	*Z	*c	*r	*l	*n	*ɲ
Proto Chuukic-Pohnpeic	*p	*p ^w	*f	*m	*m ^w	*k	*∅,r ³	*ŋ	*y	*w	*t	*j	*t	*t	∅	*c	*r	*l	*n	*ɲ
Proto-Pohnpeic	*p ¹	*p ^w	*p, ∅ ²	*m	*m ^w	*k	*∅,r ³	*ŋ	*y	*w	*j,∅ ¹ {i,u,e ⁴ }	*j	*t	*t	∅	*c	*r	*l	*n	*∅,n{high v _} }
Mokilese	*p ¹	*p ^w	*p, ∅ ²	*m	*m ^w	*k	*∅,r ³	*ŋ	*∅,y	*w	*j ¹ ,∅ ¹ {i,u,e ⁴ }	*j	*t̚	*t̚	∅	*s	*r	*l	*n	*∅,n{high v _} }

¹ In the Pohnpeic languages, geminate obstruents are realized as homorganic nasal-obstruent clusters.
² Often before /i/.
³ Before /a/.
⁴ The reflex is *∅ sporadically before PMc *e.

Grammar

Basic word order

The basic word order for Mokilese is Subject-Verb-Object (Harrison & Albert, 1976).
ex. Wool lapp-o loakjid phon woss-o. Man old-that to fish on reef-that That old man is fishing on the reef.
This example shows the subject (man) comes first, then the verb (to fish), and lastly, the object (reef).

Reduplication

There are many forms of reduplication in Mokilese. The most common reduplication form is a reduplication of the first CVC of a word.

- *poadok* –to plant something
 - *poadpoadok* – to be planting something
- *loang* – fly
 - *loangloang* – full of flies

Next, there's the CVh reduplication form. This is the reduplication of the first CV of a word and lengthening of the vowel with /h/.

- *wia* – to do
 - *wihwi'a* – to be doing
- *no* – a wave
 - *nohno* – lots of waves

Another reduplication form Mokilese has is VCC. When reduplicating VC, the consonant is also geminated.

- *oapi* – to pull something
 - *oappoap* – to pull
- *ir* – to string
 - *irrir* – to be stringing

There is also the CV reduplication, which reduplicates the first CV of a word. However, sometimes the CV reduplication can become CVV.

- *mwahl* – *bad*
 - *mwamwahl* – *to treat badly*
- *doa* – to sew something
 - *doadoa* – to sew

Lastly, there is also the CVC reduplication form. CVC reduplicates the last CVC of a word rather than the first, and it is also a suffix, unlike the other forms, which are prefixes.

- *pwirej* – dirt
 - *pwirejrej* – dirty
- *sakai* – rock
 - *sakaikai* – rocky

Numerals

Mokilese has a base 10 counting system. Rather than having just one set of numbers, Mokilese has four sets, each used to count different things. Each number consist of a numeral prefix and a numeral classifier. Most of the numeral prefixes are similar across the four different sets, it is the general classifier that distinguishes one set from another. The four general classifiers are *-w*, *-men*, *-pas*, and *-kij*, as shown in the chart below.

	-w	-men	-pas	-kij
<i>One'</i>	e-w	e-men	e-pas	e-kif
<i>Two</i>	ria-w	roah-men	rah-pas	riah-kij
<i>Three</i>	jilu-w	jil-men	jil-pas	jil-kij
<i>Four</i>	pah-w	pah-men	pah-pas	pah-kij
<i>Five</i>	limoa-w	lim-men	lim-pas	lim-kij
<i>Six</i>	wono-w	won-men	won-pas	won-kij
<i>Seven</i>	iju-w	ij-men	ij-pas	ij-kij
<i>Eight</i>	walu-w	wal-men	wal-pas	wal-lij
<i>Nine</i>	duoa-w	doh-man	doh-pas	doh-kij

-w is a general classifier; it is used to count numbers and describe other objects that are not covered by the other number classifiers.

- *puk riaw* – two books

-men describes animate nouns such as people, bird, animal, fish, etc.

- *woal roahmen* – two men

-pas is used to describe long objects like pencil, canoe, songs, stories, road, etc.

- *suhkoa rahpas* – two trees

-*kij* is for describing things that have parts and pieces such as slices of bread, sheets of paper, fragment of a mirror, etc.

- *wija ijkij* – seven pieces of land

Mokilese's numerals can also reach up to the billions. However, most of the higher numerals are rarely used because there are only so many things that they would need to count in millions or billions.

Vocabulary

Indigenous vocabulary

- *soa* - leaf
- *ros* - dark
- *ringoaingoai* - thin
- *pik* - sand
- *war* - canoe
- *doahk* - dog
- *ad''* - name

Loanwords

Mokilese has borrowed numerous words from languages of foreigners who traveled into Micronesia, as well as from other Micronesian languages. Some Micronesian languages that influenced Mokilese were Pohnpeian, Marshallese, Pingelapese, and Kusaiean (Rehg & Bender, 1990). The reason why Mokilese borrowed words from these languages was because they had lived in close contact with the people of these islands for many years. Because of how this borrowing occurred, it is hard to tell exactly when the words were borrowed, especially since there were hardly any documentations from back then. On top of that, not all loanwords are easy to identify because these languages are all, more or less, closely related to Mokilese. Sheldon P. Harrison (1976) believed there to be more loanwords from other Micronesian languages, but "it is difficult to tell exactly how many because of the problems in distinguishing such borrowings from native Mokilese words." With that said, a few loanwords from these places have been identified.

Words derived from Pohnpeian:

- *indan* – popular
- *pohnkahke* – lazy
- *rahnmwahu* – greetings
- *wahnpooaroan* – minister

Words derived from Marshallese:

- *moado* – skilled navigator
- *mej* – exhausted

Word derived from Marshallese:

- *doa* – sugar cane

Mokilese also borrowed words from foreign languages such as German, Spanish, Japanese, and English. These borrowings occurred due to colonization. The first of these languages to come in contact with Mokilese was Spanish, which occurred in the 16th century, when Spanish explorers discovered Micronesia (Hezel, 1992). Then they colonized the Mokil Atoll in 1886. Shortly after, Spain sold the island to Germany after they lost the Spanish–American War in 1898 (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2014). Later, in 1914, the island was seized by Japan in 1919, and heavily fortified during World War II, until they surrendered and passed it on to United States in August 1945 (Hezel, 1992). Thereafter, it became part of a UN trust territory under U.S. jurisdiction in 1947 until the trust territory dissolved in 1986 (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2014). All this outside contact introduced many loanwords to Mokilese, although there are only a few for Spanish and German because their contact durations were shorter.

Word derived from Spanish:

- *pwohla* – ball
- *mihsa* – mass

Word derived from German:

- *dois* – Germany
- *mahk* – mark/German money

Word derived from Japanese:

- *sasimi* – raw fish, from *sashimi*
- *midido* – catcher's mitt, from *mitto*
- *aramaki* – belly band, from *haramaki*
- *ansu* – apricot tree, from *anzu no ki*
- *ohdai* – bandage, from *hotai*

- *jidoḥsa* – car, from *jidosha*
- *jikeng* – test, from *shiken*
- *pehnggohsi* – defender, from *bengosha*

Word derived from English (before WWII):

- *sehpil* – table
- *jip* – ship
- *kepden* – captain
- *ama* – hammer
- *pilahwa* – flour, bread
- *roam* – rum
- *ju* – shoe
- *ehl* – Hell
- *krihn* – green
- *inj* – inch
- *dainj* – dance

Word derived from English (after WWII):

- *delpwohn* – telephone
- *kias* – gasoline
- *klohraks* – bleach
- *kirajiweid* – graduate
- *koangkiris* – congress

Endangerment

Materials

Not only is the Mokilese language endangered, it also lacks extensive documentation. The complete published resources are a Mokilese-English Dictionary (Harrison & Albert, 1977) and a Mokilese Reference Grammar (Harrison & Albert, 1976). However these resources are fairly outdated since they were written in the 1960s and the language is changing rapidly. Other physical materials in Mokilese are books of chants, songs, accounts and tales of Mokil Atoll, which are few. There is also one short interview video, and a couple of war dance videos on YouTube. However, there are no websites, TV shows, or radio stations in their language.

Vitality

Mokilese is an endangered language. It is only spoken at home, and the language acquisition is getting worse with each generation. This is because the younger generations are not fluent speakers, they prefer learning Pohnpeian and English instead, so only the elders and adults are actually fluent (Poll, 2013). This is just for the Mokilese speakers in Pohnpei and Mokil Atoll; the speakers in the U. S. are all old and have no domains of use, so when they die, there will be no more speakers in the United States (Lewis, Simons, & Fennig, 2013). On top of that, Mokilese not only does not have government recognition, there is not even a single school that teaches Mokilese (Poll, 2013).

Further reading

- Encyclopædia Britannica. (2014). Caroline Islands (archipelago, Pacific Ocean) -- Encyclopædia Britannica. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/96488/Caroline-Islands>
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References

1. Mokilese (<https://www.ethnologue.com/18/language/mki/>) at *Ethnologue* (18th ed., 2015)
2. Hammarström, Harald; Forkel, Robert; Haspelmath, Martin, eds. (2017). "Mokilese" (<http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/moki1238>). *Glottolog 3.0*. Jena, Germany: Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History.
3. Lewis, M. Paul (ed.), 2009. Ethnologue: Languages of the World, Sixteenth edition. Dallas, Tex.: SIL International. Online version: <http://www.ethnologue.com/>.
4. Bender, Byron W. (2003). "Proto-Micronesian Reconstructions: 1". *Oceanic Linguistics*. 42 (1): 4, 5. doi:10.2307/3623449 (<https://doi.org/10.2307/3623449>). JSTOR 3623449 (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3623449>).

External links

- [A Mokilese Grammar \(https://web.archive.org/web/20070713072538/http://www.ethnomath.org/resources/harrison1976.pdf\)](https://web.archive.org/web/20070713072538/http://www.ethnomath.org/resources/harrison1976.pdf)
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